

SYLLABUS: LINGUISTICS 191

LINGUISTICS, THE INTERNET, AND SOCIAL MEDIA

SPRING 2021

Course Overview

Instructor

Instructor: Prof. Crystal Akers

Email address: cakers@rutgers.edu

Office hours: On Zoom Tuesdays 10 am – 11 am. Also available by appointment.

Course Delivery

This course is fully online. To access the course, please visit canvas.rutgers.edu. For more information about course access or support, contact the [OIT Help Desk](#) at 833-OIT-HELP.

Course Description

With its acronyms, abbreviations, emoticons, emoji, and memes, the language used on the internet can seem wildly different from writing and speech elsewhere. Will emoji spell the end of written English as we know it? How does the language we use in social media reflect variables like age, gender, and our relationships with others? And how does the language used on the internet today compare to its forms in the recent past?

In this online, asynchronous, 1.5 credit course, students will examine “internet language” – the forms of computer-mediated communication (CMC) from email to IM, texts to tweets – to understand its affective and social functions and how it relates to other forms of written and spoken English. What linguistics is and how linguists study computer-mediated communication will be examined throughout the course, using scholarly and popular sources covering topics including grammar, pragmatics, and variation and change. By the end of the course, students will develop a familiarity with some research methods linguists use to study language use in social media and the internet and explore how these methods can be used to investigate current usage of “internet language.”

Prerequisites

- None

Important Dates

- The course begins on 01/19/2021.
- **All work must be submitted by 03/07/2021.**

Course Learning Objectives

By the end of this course, you will be able to:

- discuss how computer-mediated communication (CMC) evinces at least three different linguistic concepts, which may include grammar, pragmatics, linguistic variation, or the social and affective functions of language use
- evaluate popular or sensationalist claims about CMC objectively and knowledgeably
- discuss different methods to investigate novel questions about CMC

Department Learning Goals Met by this Course

Students will:

- reason about language scientifically
- demonstrate knowledge of cross-linguistic variability and universal patterns in language
- identify what someone knows when they know a language

Course Materials

Required Text(s), Videos, and Website Resources

- Most of our required resources are in the public domain and can be accessed from links provided in the syllabus and course site. Others may be accessed on Canvas.

Optional Materials

- Additional resources are linked in the “Optional Resources” section at the bottom of each Canvas unit page.

Technology Requirements

Baseline technical skills necessary for online courses

- Basic computer and web-browsing skills
- Navigating Canvas

Technology skills necessary for this specific course

- Collaborating on VoiceThread
- Recording, editing, and uploading video

Required Equipment

- Computer: current Mac (OS X) or PC (Windows 7 or newer) with high-speed internet connection
- Webcam: built-in or external webcam, fully installed
- Microphone: built-in laptop or tablet mic or external microphone

Required Software

- Microsoft Word

Assessment

Assignment Summary

This course will require you to spend roughly the same amount of time on the instructional resources, activities, and assessments each week as you would in a traditional classroom course, about 8 hours per week.

Below are the assignments required for this course and the value each assignment contributes to the final course grade. Please refer to the course calendar on Canvas and/or the course schedule below for specific due dates. All information on Canvas supersedes the information here.

Assignment	Points
Intro Activities	12
Lessons (Readings & Videos)	6
Assessments	50
Presentation	32
Total	100

See course schedule, below, for due dates.

Assignment Overview

Intro Activities: 12%

- Six intro activities; 2 points each, graded on adequate completion as specified in the activity instructions.

- Each module will begin with an intro activity designed to get you thinking about the topic. The kind of activity will vary, but may include discussion prompts, reflections, and participation in surveys or questionnaires.
- **Note:** Sometimes you will need to complete an activity or lesson in one module before you are able to open another module. Canvas will let you know when there are prerequisites.

Lessons (Readings & Videos): 6%

- Six lessons; 1 point each
- Each module will include readings and/or videos. There will be questions or activities to allow you to assess your understanding of the lessons. Your work will be graded on completion, and you will have the chance to resubmit your work if you need to review topics.

Assessments: 50%

- Six assessments; 10 points each; lowest score will be dropped.
- Each module will end with an assessment requiring you to apply what you've learned. For example, you might be asked to find and analyze examples of CMC in public social media accounts, or you might be asked to design interview questions or experimental instruments to understand why people use the language they do.
- Your work will be graded according to a rubric. **After you receive feedback, you will have one opportunity to resubmit your work for a higher grade.**
- **All revisions must be submitted by 03/07/2021 in order for me to grade them.**

Presentation: 32%

- Planning sheet: 2 points
- Presentation: 30 points
- What aspect of CMC has interested you, and what have you learned about it? In your presentation, you will provide examples of some CMC phenomenon that interests you, describe its linguistic characteristics, address its social factors or social meaning as you understand them, and relate the phenomenon to the topics and research we've covered in this course.
- Format: Your choice! Use the planning sheet (and my feedback) to ensure you include all required content. You can submit your work as an essay, slide presentation, video, or podcast. Your work will be shared with the rest of the class.
- You may submit your presentation anytime after Week 4 begins.
- Your work will be graded according to a rubric. After you receive feedback, you will have one opportunity to resubmit your work for a higher grade.
- **All revisions must be submitted by 03/07/2021 in order for me to grade them.**

Grading Scale

(Source: Rutgers standard undergraduate grade scale)

Grade	Range
A	90 – 100
B+	85 – 89
B	80 – 84
C+	75 – 79
C	70 – 74
D	60 – 69
F	Below 60

Student Participation Expectations

Because this is an online course, your attendance is based on your online activity and participation. The following is a summary of everyone's expected participation:

- Logging in: AT LEAST TWICE PER WEEK**
 Be sure you are logging in to the course in Canvas each week, including weeks with holidays or weeks with minimal online course activity. (During most weeks you will probably log in several times.) If you have a situation that might cause you to miss an entire week of class, discuss it with me *as soon as possible*.
- Time Commitment**
 To be successful in this course, you should plan to dedicate approximately 8 hours per week.
- Office hours and live sessions: OPTIONAL**
 Other than the midterm and final, any live, scheduled events for the course, including my office hours, are optional. For any live presentations, I will provide a recording that you can watch later. If you are required to discuss an assignment with me, please contact me at the beginning of the week if you need a time outside my scheduled office hours.

Discussion and Communication Guidelines

The following are my expectations for how we should communicate as a class. Above all, please remember to be respectful and thoughtful.

- **Writing style:** Your writing should be appropriate for your audience and purpose. Your audience here consists of your peers and professor, and you're writing for an academic purpose. Academic style for grammar, spelling, and punctuation is always acceptable, but it's ok to include occasional emoji as well, and it's ok to quote content you've found online – just let us know the source, and if you're not sure if it's appropriate, email me. Refrain from using all CAPITAL LETTERS, as this is often interpreted as shouting.
- **Tone and civility:** Let's maintain a supportive learning community where everyone feels safe and where people can disagree amicably. Remember that sarcasm doesn't always come across online. Treat your instructor and fellow students with respect at all times, and in all communications.
- **Citing your sources:** When we have academic discussions, you must cite your sources to back up what you say. For the textbook or other course materials, include at least the title and page numbers or section heading. For online sources, include the site name and a link.
- **Backing up your work:** Consider composing your academic posts in a word processor, where you can save your work, and then copying into the Canvas discussion.

Support and Policies

Late and Missing Work

Because all work will be completed asynchronously for this course, there is no formal attendance policy; however, regular class engagement will be assessed through the assigned activities and assessments.

- **Missing work:** Canvas is set to automatically record a "0" for any assignment that has no submission once the due date passes. This helps give you an accurate picture of your current grade.
- **Late work:** You may submit work late, up to the last date listed for Week 7 on the course schedule. **Canvas is set to automatically deduct 10% for each week that an assignment is late, rounding up.**
 - Example 1: An assignment is due at the end of Week 1. You submit it 2 minutes late. Canvas counts this as late 1 week. Canvas will automatically deduct 10% from the maximum grade for the assignment.
 - Example 2: An assignment is due at the end of Week 1. You submit it during Week 7. Canvas counts this as 6 weeks late. Canvas will automatically deduct 60% from the maximum grade for the assignment.
- **Word to the wise:** I've checked the calculations, and it's possible to pass this course even if you submit everything as late as possible – but, you would need to be earning 100% on everything to do so. I *really* don't recommend waiting until the end. **The best**

strategy is to submit your work on time, even if it's incomplete, and use the revision policy plus my feedback to boost your scores along the way.

Extra Credit

You have the opportunity to raise your final grade by up to 2 points through experimental participation.

- Some faculty and graduate students in the Department of Linguistics do experimental research on language. This research depends on the participation of undergraduate participants.
- You have the option of participating in Linguistics experiments during the semester. Each experiment usually takes between 20 and 45 minutes.
- You will get **1 point credit for every half hour** of experimental participation. It does not matter what subfield of Linguistics this experiment is in, but it must be in Linguistics.
- Experiments are offered through the Linguistics Department [experimental management system \(sona\) website](#) . Towards the beginning of the semester, your name and email will be added to the experiment system. You will be issued an anonymous id to participate in experiments through this system. Once Linguistics experiments are posted, you can sign up online. Note that this system is different from the psychology pool, and you should not use a psychology ID to log in to the system.
- Any student enrolled in a Linguistics undergraduate course is eligible to participate in Linguistics experiments, regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, language status, or impairments, disorders, or disabilities (as long as his/her instructor provides the opportunity). You cannot be denied participation for any of these reasons.
- **You have the right to not participate in experiments to earn extra credit. You may speak with me about possible research alternatives, such as reading a pre-approved scholarly article in linguistics and writing a 2-page paper summarizing it.**
- If you are taking multiple Linguistics courses that allow for experimental participation to count towards extra credit, you are responsible for making sure you have assigned the credit correctly through the experiment system online. This is not your instructor's, the experimenter's or the experiment system administrator's job!
- If you sign up for, but fail to show up for, two or more experiments, you may be barred from further participation and restricted to research alternatives as described above, so please note the time and location of your experiments and take your schedule and transportation time into account. Many experiments have restrictions on how late you may cancel online.

Faculty Feedback and Response Time

I am providing the following list to give you an idea of my intended availability throughout the course. (Remember that you can email help@canvas.rutgers.edu or 877-361-1134 if you have a technical problem.)

Grading and Feedback

For activities and assessments that have free responses, you can generally expect feedback within **7-10 days** of the assignment's due date.

E-mail

I will reply to e-mails within **24 hours on school days, and by the next business day on weekends and holidays**. Please include the course name or number in the subject line.

Discussion Forums

Some activities or assessments may involve posting in discussion forums or other online spaces where you can interact with your classmates. I view these spaces as your places to talk amongst yourselves, and while I will check these spaces regularly, I may not post a response myself every time.

Academic Integrity

The consequences of scholastic dishonesty are very serious. Please review the [Rutgers' academic integrity policy](#).

Academic integrity means, among other things:

- Develop and write all of your own assignments.
- Show in detail where the materials you use in your papers come from. Create citations whether you are paraphrasing authors or quoting them directly. Be sure always to show source and page number within the assignment and include a bibliography in the back.
- Do not fabricate information or citations in your work.
- Do not facilitate academic dishonesty for another student by allowing your own work to be submitted by others.

If you are in doubt about any issue related to plagiarism or scholastic dishonesty, please discuss it with your instructor.

Other sources of information to which you can refer include:

- [Rutgers' Academic Integrity website](#)
- [Code of Student Conduct](#)
- [Eight Cardinal Rules of Academic Integrity](#)

Please note: Collaboration and interaction are expected and integral aspects of work in this class and outside of it in the highly-connected world we live in today. I encourage you to work together whenever possible and to make the most of the collaborative tools available on our course site and social media – or just get together in person if you're on campus.

Here is some specific guidance on where collaboration is and is not permitted in this course:

- Avoid working on quizzes together
- Avoid talking about quiz questions and answers during quiz availability periods.
- Submit your own work for all assignments.
- Cite your sources, including classmates whose thoughts have informed your own opinions.
 - *This point is especially important for discussions. Identifying a classmate who has changed or expanded your thinking in some way not only gives them proper attribution, it helps us build an online learning community that recognizes and values participation.*

Consult the following links for tips on how to improve your note-taking to avoid accidental plagiarism:

- [Don't Plagiarize! Document Your Research](#)
- [Resources for Students: Identifying and Avoiding Academic Dishonesty](#)

Any collaboration with other students to answer quiz questions is a violation of Rutgers' Academic Integrity Policy. Students caught cheating or committing plagiarism will be penalized, as per Rutgers policy.

Academic Support Services

- Rutgers has a variety of resources for academic support. For more information, check the [Academic Support website](#).
- Rutgers has Learning Centers on each campus where any student can obtain tutoring and other help, including writing coaching. For information, check the [Learning Center website](#) or the [Writing Coaching website](#).
- Rutgers also has a Writing Center where students can obtain help with writing skills and assignments. Learn more at the [Writing Center website](#).
- Many library resources are available online. Assistance is available through phone, email, and chat. For information, check the [Rutgers Libraries website](#).

Rutgers Health, Counseling, ADAP, and Psychiatric Services

- Rutgers Health Services is dedicated to health for the whole student body, mind and spirit. It accomplishes this through a staff of qualified clinicians and support staff, and delivers services at a number of locations throughout the New Brunswick-Piscataway area. For information regarding clinical services or pharmacy services, check the [Medical Services](#) website. For more information, check the [Rutgers Health Services website](#).
- Undergraduate and graduate students experience a great many stresses in their lives - sorting out one's identity, establishing and maintaining important relationships, coping with anxiety and depression, working on changing relationships with parents and other family members, dealing with losses, handling new academic demands, and dealing with reactions to one's differentness. To help with these tasks, [Counseling, ADAP & Psychiatric Services \(CAPS\)](#) provides a variety of psychological counseling services for all students of Rutgers University in New Brunswick/Piscataway, undergraduate and graduate. Services are free, and confidentiality is guaranteed within legal and ethical guidelines.

Legal Services

If you are in need of legal services, please contact [Student Legal Services](#).

Veteran Services

If you are a military veteran or are on active military duty, you can obtain support through the [Office of Veteran and Military Programs and Services](#).

Student Involvement

The [Department of Student Involvement](#) can connect you with student engagement opportunities on campus.

Additional Resources

[Violence Prevention & Victim Assistance \(VPVA\)](#)

(848) 932-1181 / 3 Bartlett Street, New Brunswick, NJ 08901, The Office for Violence Prevention and Victim Assistance provides confidential crisis intervention, counseling and advocacy for victims of sexual and relationship violence and stalking to students, staff and faculty. To reach staff during office hours when the university is open or to reach an advocate after hours, call 848-932-1181.

Accommodations for Accessibility

Requesting accommodations

Rutgers University welcomes students with disabilities into all of the University's educational programs. In order to receive consideration for reasonable accommodations, a student with a disability must contact the appropriate disability services office at the campus where you are officially enrolled, participate in an intake interview, and provide documentation. More information can be found in the [Documentation Guidelines](#) section of the [Office for Disability Services](#) website.

If the documentation supports your request for reasonable accommodations, your campus's disability services office will provide you with a Letter of Accommodations. Please share this letter with your instructors and discuss the accommodations with them as early in your courses as possible. To begin this process, please complete the [Registration Form](#) on the [Office for Disability Services](#) website.

Visit the [Student section of the Office of Disability Services](#) website for more information.

Accessibility and Privacy Links

Accessibility Statements

- [Canvas](#)
- [VoiceThread](#)

Privacy Policies

- [Canvas](#)
- [VoiceThread](#)

Course Schedule and Deadlines

Please see the appropriate unit on the course site to find detailed information about each assignment, including rubrics and specific due dates. Required Instructional Resources are provided here; the course site may include additional optional resources.

Information provided on the course site supersedes details provided here.

Week & Topic	Objectives	Graded Assignments	Required Resources
Week 1 1/19 – 1/24 What is linguistics?	1. Recognize course policies and expectations 2. Recognize subfields of linguistics by definition and by example 3. Understand what it means for language to be the “original wiki” 4. Distinguish forms of variation, given examples 5. Explain the difference between prescriptive and descriptive grammar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intro Activity 1 • Lesson 1 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read: Syllabus • Watch: Pinker, “Linguistics as a Window to Understanding the Brain.” • Watch: Gawne & Vaughn, “I can haz language play: Construction of Language and Identity in LOLspeak”. (20 min).
Week 2 1/25 – 1/31 Variation & Social Groups	1. Collect language data from public social media accounts 2. Identify variation in CMC 3. Identify social factors relevant to online social groups 4. Discuss CMC variation in terms of social groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessment 1 • Intro Activity 2 • Lesson 2 • Assessment 2 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Watch: Language Variation and Change. • Read: McCulloch, Because Internet, Ch. 2 • Read: Holmes, “Social Factors, Dimensions, and Explanations”.
Week 3 2/1 – 2/7 Projecting Identity/ Intraspeaker Variation	1. Identify intraspeaker variation in public social media accounts 2. Understand how language can be used to project identity 3. Analyze intraspeaker variation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intro Activity 3 • Lesson 3 • Assessment 3 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read: Morikawa, E. (2019) – (Excerpt) • Watch: Discussion of Morikawa E. • Listen: Lingthusiasm Episode 13

Week & Topic	Objectives	Graded Assignments	Required Resources
Week 4 2/8 – 2/14 Social expectations of others online	1. Explain how language influences our social expectations of speakers 2. Design a survey to assess social expectations based on language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Intro Activity 4 Lesson 4 Assessment 4 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read: Drager 2014 Read: McCulloch, Because Internet, Ch. 2
Week 5 2/15 – 2/21 What's language and what's not: <i>The limits of emoji</i>	1. Explain the design features of human language 2. Discuss the evidence for or against language-like qualities in emojis and LOLspeak 3. Evaluate popular or sensationalist claims about CMC objectively and knowledgeably	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Intro Activity 5 Lesson 5 Assessment 5 Presentation Planning sheet 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Listen: Medloch & McCulloch, "The Linguistic Secrets Found in Billions of Emoji"; Focus on 20:52 and later. (40 min) Watch: Medloch & McCulloch, "The Linguistic Secrets Found in Billions of Emoji". Focus on slide 27 and later.
Week 6 2/22 – 2/28 Keeping your friends close: <i>Negotiating relationships with CMC</i>	1. Identify & discuss how social and affective functions of language are conveyed and interpreted 2. Discuss implicature in CMC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Intro Activity 6 Lesson 6 Assessment 6 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Listen: Dankosky, "How Hashtags, Texts, and Tweets are Influencing Digital Language". Watch: Gunraj et al. video Watch: Lewis, "Gricean Pragmatics" (13 min). Link Watch: Pinker, "What our language habits reveal" (start at 10:13; 7 min). Link
Week 7 3/1 - 3/7 Wrap-Up	1. Analyze language in CMC 2. Discuss social factors of variation in CMC 3. Discuss a method to investigate novel questions about CMC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Presentation 	

References

These are the our major references. Additional resources will be available on Canvas.

Baron, Naomi. (2010). *Always On*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Gawne, Lauren & Vaughn, Jill. (2011). I can haz language play: Construction of language and identity in LOLspeak. *2011 Australian Linguistic Society Annual Conference*. [Video]. Retrieved from <https://vimeo.com/33318759>

Gunraj, D. N., Drumm-Hewitt A. M., Dashow, E. M., Upadhyay, S. S. N., Klin, C. M.. (2016, Feb.). Texting insincerely: The role of the period in text messages. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 55, 1067-1075. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2015.11.003>

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Lewis, Karen. (2014, August 13). Gricean Pragmatics. *Wireless Philosophy*. [Video]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=we6uSVf4qss>

Ling, R., & Baron, N. S. (2007). Text Messaging and IM Linguistic Comparison of American College Data. *Journal Of Language & Social Psychology*, 26(3), 291-298.
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Medlock, Ben & McCulloch, Gretchen. (2016, March 12). The linguistic secrets found in billions of emoji. SXSW. [PowerPoint slides]. Retrieved from <http://www.slideshare.net/SwiftKey/the-linguistic-secrets-found-in-billions-of-emoji-sxsw-2016-presentation-59956212>

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Morikawa, E. (2019). *This Is What a Feminist Tweets Like: "Women's Language" and Styling Activist Identities in a #YesAllWomen Twitter Corpus*. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.

Pinker, Steven. (2005, July). What our language habits reveal. *TEDGlobal 2005*. [Video]. Retrieved from http://www.ted.com/talks/steven_pinker_on_language_and_thought

Pinker, Steven. (2012, October 6). Linguistics as a Window to Understanding the Brain. *Big Think*. [Video]. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=2490&v=Q-B_ONJIEcE